

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING of ST AUSTELL TOWN COUNCIL held on MONDAY 29th APRIL 2024 at 6.00pm in The Registrar's Office, Carlyon Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 4LD.

Present: Councillors: Brown, Bull, Clemo, Cohen, Fox, French, Kimber, Lanxon, Pearce, Pears, Preece, Rowse, Styles, Thompson and Young.

In attendance: David Pooley (Town Clerk) and Sara Gwilliams (Deputy Town Clerk).

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the proceedings.

APM/24/01) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Double, Gray, Guest, Hamilton and Stephens.

APM/24/02) Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th April 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting on the 24th April 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

APM/24/03) Lea Hill - Kernow Young Carers

The Mayor advised that Lea Hill had tendered her apologies earlier in the day for not being able to present that evening due to unforeseen personal reasons.

APM/24/04) Councillor Crystal Pearce – Mayor of St Austell Review of the 2023/24 Civic Year

The Mayor provided an overview of the last 12 months and expressed her thanks to Councillors, her deputy Councillor Young and the Clerk and his team. She paid tribute to Councillor Deborah George who sadly passed away during the year and welcomed three new Councillors, Councillors Kimber, Gray and Preece. She highlighted the Old Vicarage Place roof top garden feasibility project that is being worked up and the plans to replace the banners on the Poundland building and design and delivery of a church piazza scheme. She advised that over the last 12 months the Town Council has considered 80 planning applications and approved 18 grants for local organisations. Other achievements she listed as follows:

- Bethel Park mine capping;
- Demolished the old toilet block and erected a bat house in Poltair Park;
- Agreed additional funding for the town centre security guards, town centre planting schemes and Christmas lights;
- Objected to a major Planning Application at Aspen Drive which led to Cornwall Council's Planning Committee refusing the application;
- Provided free parking in Priory Car Park on the last four Saturdays in December for Christmas shopping;
- Obtained a clean bill of health for health and safety, financial records and governance;
- Taken on the planting at St Austell station;
- Facilitated a number of community events in the Town Council's parks:
 - Coronation events
 - Party in the park

- Charity dog show
 - Big butterfly count
- Successfully bid for community chest monies to paint the skateboard ramp at Bethel Park;
 - Recruited a Grounds Maintenance Apprentice;
 - Obtained grant funding and installed a bus shelter at Holmbush;
 - Allotments at Alexandra Road cleared and a vacant plot re-let
 - Supported a community group working in Truro Road Park to achieve a 4 star South West in Bloom Award

The Mayor advised that Community Infrastructure Levy funding was successfully secured to assist with the complete refurbishment of Bethel Park. The project was completed within a couple of months in time for the summer holidays and has 9 brand new items, a sensory garden, a wildflower area, more trees and an accessible path and is proving very popular. The other parks and open spaces have received some investment with brand new safety surfacing repairs at Truro Road Park and general parks and play equipment maintenance and repairs across all sites.

Climate change is still very important to the Council. 45 trees have been planted since May 2023 in the Town Council's parks and open spaces and we continue to maintain and enhance a number of wildflower areas. A new wildflower area has been created in Bethel park and poppies have been planted at Edgecumbe/Cosgarne Triangle and Mount Charles Roundabout for the D-Day commemorations in June. CASA's green fayre was also supported at the Holy Trinity Church in October.

The Town Council remains in partnership with Newquay Town Council to run a CCTV service for Newquay and St Austell which is the envy of many towns in Cornwall, particularly as the Tolvadden CCTV service is now likely to close leaving a lot of towns in Cornwall having to procure alternative CCTV provision. The CCTV suite is now on summer hours which means that the cameras are monitored almost 24/7 with most parts of the town covered by CCTV. The Town Council's mobile CCTV camera has been successful in two areas of the town with one placement resulting in a closure order and the other experiencing a substantial reduction in ASB. The Mayor expressed her gratitude to Charity and her team in Newquay for providing such an excellent proactive CCTV monitoring service.

The Town Council agreed to freeze the car park charges in Priory Car Park for the 2024-25 financial year and still managed to set a very reasonable Council Tax increase. Tregonissey Lane End Car Park has also received some attention over the last few months in that it has been cut back to improve visibility lines and car park attendance have been patrolling from time to time to enforce the 3 hours no return rule to prevent people from parking there all day.

New car park payment machines were installed in Priory Car Park at the beginning of the year which after a few teething problems are now working well. People visiting Priory Car Park can now pay by cash, contactless, mobile app, a QR code payment system or purchase a season ticket. Faded white lines have also been re-painting in the top section of the car park and the Town Council also facilitated the installation of EV charging points which it is hoped should increase the footfall in the town centre. A business rates assessment for Priory Car Park was successfully challenged and has achieved a saving of £36,000 for the Town Council.

The Town Council continues to lease The House to Young People Cornwall and provide them with an annual grant to help them provide much needed guidance, support, academic assistance and sporting activities for young people across the town.

The library is still performing well with on average 6000 people visiting the library every month. It is still in the top two busiest libraires in Cornwall and has a wide range of activities each month. The Town Council has taken on the Home Library Service from Cornwall Council and now oversees 7 volunteers delivering books to people who due to mobility issues are unable to visit the library themselves. The library is also actively involved in the St Austell Literacy Festival due to take place for the second time in June.

The Mayor concluded that the Mayor Elect, Councillor Julian Young, has pledged to carry on supporting Kernow Young Carers during his mayoral year and thanked Members for their support with the Christmas boxes and the Johnny Cowling fundraising event.

APM/24/05) David Pooley – Town Clerk St Austell Town Council – 2023/24 Financial Accounts

The Town Clerk advised that the 2023/24 draft Accounts have been reviewed by the Internal Auditor and are due to be reported to the full Council on Wednesday 15th May 2024. He advised that the main points were:

- Car Park income for the year £245,954 (£14,000 less than 2022/23);
- Other grants and contributions – Funding for: Bethel Park refurbishment, rooftop garden project, installation of a bus shelter at Holmbush and church piazza design project;
- Transfer from reserves – Bethel and Truro Road Park capital projects, Poltair Park toilet block demolition and creation of a bat house and town centre regeneration projects;
- Miscellaneous expenses - consultants costs for roof top project;
- Savings have been achieved through cheaper insurance, a successful challenge of the business rates for Priory Car Park and grounds maintenance supplies.

The outturn for the 2023/24 financial year shows a surplus of £13,000 on a turnover of £1.6 million.

The balance sheet shows a healthy financial position with assets well exceeding liabilities, no borrowing and a cash balance of £135,000.

APM/24/06) David Pooley – Town Clerk Priorities of St Austell Town Council for the 2024/25 Civic Year

The Clerk explained that at the end of last year, an informal meeting was held to discuss the Town Council's priorities which helped formulate the budget for the 2024/25 financial year which was approved in December 2023. He explained that the priorities identified at that time were:

- Town centre revitalisation partnership – town centre projects/funding
- Continue partnership working to tackle anti-social behaviour
- Playground equipment replacement
- Re-lining of Priory Car Park
- Place shaping – pride in place

- Climate change initiatives
- Secure suitable premises for the Town Council
- Engage with Cornwall Council with regard to property reviews
- St Austell library – continue to broaden community benefits
- Continue to demonstrate and communicate improvements in service

During discussion, Members asked that the following be added to the list of priorities.

1. Continue to make suitable researched comments on planning applications;
2. Actively engage with Cornwall Council to influence the review of the Cornwall Local Plan.

Members felt strongly that the Town Council does not promote itself particularly well and suggested that the Town Clerk should draft a communications strategy for consideration at the next Finance and General Purposes Committee. This document should outline a clear strategy for Members to publicise the good work of the Town Council through various media outlets.

APM/24/07) Open forum for questions from the public

Mrs Earl expressed her gratitude to the Town Council for their hard work and agreed that the Council is not good at publicising the excellent work that it does. She added that some of the empty buildings around the town are an eyesore and made particular reference to the Conserv owned General Wolfe building and the privately owned Clinton House on Truro Road. Mrs Earl also expressed concern about the cancellation of the number 27 bus route and the withdrawal of the reasonably fast bus route between St Austell and Truro. She concluded with thanks to the Town Council for supporting Climate Action St Austell (CASA) and the annual Garden Festival.

APM/24/08) Members' questions

The Clerk advised that the following question had been received from Councillor Brown:

At the last Council meeting on 18th March 2024, Councillor Richard Pears advised that the bus service timetable was due to change at Easter.

The new timetable includes significant changes and reductions in services affecting St Austell parish.

What involvement has the Portfolio holder had in formulating these changes and what does he think of the new schedules for St Austell?

In responses to this question, Councillor Richard Pears, Town Councillor and Cornwall Councillor Portfolio Holder for Transport advised that with effect from 31st March 2024 there have been changes to bus services, which include changes in the St Austell area. The subsidised network operated by Go Cornwall Bus on behalf of Cornwall Council has remained largely the same with just minor timing changes. First Kernow's commercial network has seen more changes to help improve reliability, punctuality and to ensure that the network remains commercially sustainable. The main changes are:

- Service 24 (Fowey and St Austell)
- Service 29 (St Austell and Mevagissey)

- Service 27 replaced with T2

During discussion, Members expressed concern with regard to the deletion of Service 27 and the lack of a bus service from Truro to St Austell after 6.30pm.

Councillor Pears advised that in Cornwall bus usage has increased by 33% and the last bus survey results indicate that Cornwall has the 4th best bus service in the UK. He added that the amended routes allow more passengers to be picked up.

Arising from a question, Councillors Pears advised that he had been consulted on the proposed changes for the whole of Cornwall, not just St Austell.

The Clerk **AGREED** to ask Cornwall Council for a full list of the bus route changes that affect St Austell for consideration at the Council meeting on the 15th May 2024.

APM/24/09) Mayor's closing comments

The Mayor thanked everybody for coming to the meeting.

Meeting closed at 19.07.